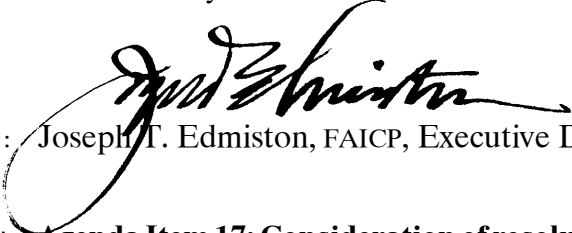


# Memorandum

To : The Conservancy  
The Advisory Committee

Date: March 22, 2004

From :  Joseph T. Edmiston, FAICP, Executive Director

Subject: **Agenda Item 17: Consideration of resolution authorizing a grant to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority from the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Fund for habitat and endangered species protection improvements in Upper Las Virgenes Canyon (formerly Ahmanson Ranch), unincorporated Ventura County, and authorizing any budget amendments necessary.**

Staff Recommendation: That the Conservancy authorize a grant in the amount of \$60,000 to the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) from the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy Fund for habitat and endangered species protection improvements in Upper Las Virgenes Canyon (formerly Ahmanson Ranch), unincorporated Ventura County, and authorizing any budget amendments necessary.

Legislative Authority: Section 6500 *et seq.* of the Government Code.

Background: The 2,983-acre Upper Las Virgenes Canyon parkland (the former Ahmanson Ranch) owned by the Conservancy is operated and managed by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) under a license agreement required and approved by the Department of General Services (DGS) as part of the acquisition transactions between the Conservancy, DGS, and the Wildlife Conservation Board (which funded \$135 million of the \$150 million purchase price).

Under the license agreement with the Conservancy, MRCA rangers and park staff have the day to day responsibilities of providing resource protection, public access, and public safety. The new park was opened for public trail use on December 1, 2003, three weeks after close of escrow, with very minimal site improvements pending additional funding. The stewardship responsibilities of both protecting and managing the federally-listed California red-legged frog and the state-endangered San Fernando Valley spineflower populations, and maintaining a large portion of the Simi Hills core habitat, are the most important concerns that require immediate funding assistance.

The MRCA's Chief Ranger has informed the Conservancy that new gates, fencing, and barricades, are urgently needed to keep illegal vehicle entry and other illegal activity out of the habitat areas, and to better direct and control legal trail users away from sensitive resource areas. Besides immediate protective measures for the species, archaeological and cultural sites

also require similar protection. Likewise, work to reduce fire threat and protect the captive frog program site at the ranch house is needed. Enlisting the public's cooperation for habitat protection would be accomplished at least in part with appropriate informational kiosk displays.

The grant of \$60,000 would be from the \$66,000 in the Conservancy Fund appropriated in the current year state budget. The Conservancy Fund is made up of various donations, settlements, and bequests made to the Conservancy to advance the work of the agency, and its use for habitat protection on the Ahmanson parkland is a fitting use of the funds. Providing for critical ecological needs while balancing strong recreational demand on the parkland obviously will require more than the immediate \$60,000 grant. Staff is pursuing potential additional funding from interested local governments and private parties.

The emergency budget proposal of \$60,000 would provide for the most immediate habitat and species protection needs and includes these estimated totals:

**Budget**

Vehicle-proof gates fabrication and installation, new gates to stop illegal off-road activity while allowing for hiking, equestrian, bicycle, and wheelchair access to the park:

\$45,000 for minimum of five gates and trailhead entries;

Boulders placement to prevent access into sensitive sites, including heavy equipment rental:

\$5,000;

Fencing installation at targeted sites:

\$3,000;

Improve signage for enforcement and education:

\$5,000;

Security and habitat improvements to captive frog reserve:

\$2,000,

**Total            \$60,000**

